



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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OPENING STATEMENT
CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
OPEN HEARING ON U.S. STRATEGY IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Today the committee begins two days of hearings on the security challenges facing the United States in the Persian Gulf and, in particular, relative to Iraq. Tomorrow we will hear from Administration witnesses, but today we have a panel of outside witnesses to help us sort through the confusion that characterizes U.S. policy toward Iraq. Joining us are:

- The Honorable James Woolsey, the Clinton Administration's first Director of Central Intelligence;
- Thomas Keaney, Director of the Foreign Policy Institute at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies and co-director of the Air Force's Gulf War Air Power Survey; and
- John Hillen, an analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a decorated U.S Army veteran of the Gulf War.

Gentlemen, we welcome you.

Many of us are deeply troubled by the course of U.S. policy and the pattern of U.S. military operations in the Persian Gulf. Iraq and Iran are clearly determined to develop long-range ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Yet we seem to shy away from the kinds of resolute actions required to deter and defend against these threats, or to affect change to political ambitions and calculations which underlie them.

The lack of a clear and consistent Iraq policy deprives increasing U.S. military operations of a guiding purpose or rationale. Operation "Desert Fox" and the ongoing skirmishes in the Northern Watch and Southern Watch no-fly zones illustrate my point. From a tactical standpoint, they are being executed almost flawlessly. We attack with precision and skill. There have been more than 100,000 sorties flown over Iraq since the end of the Gulf War without loss, a record that would be remarkable in the simplest training environment, let alone over hostile territory.

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Yet despite aggressive military action, there appears to be no discernible impact on Saddam. By most counts, Saddam remains in control of Iraq. Indeed, the apparent collapse of the U.N. weapons inspection regime in Iraq allows Saddam to inch closer to the lifting of sanctions and the easier development of the weapons, the capabilities and the consequent leverage he covets.

Until the United States articulates a consistent policy that brings coherence to our military effort in the Gulf, we will find ourselves faced with small-scale tactical military victories within the broader context of strategic defeat. Nor do I believe that time is on our side. When Iraq or Iran fields ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, (and it is only a matter of time) our position in the Gulf will be significantly complicated and more dangerous.

In sum, the pattern I see in the Gulf – where our interests endure but our long-term influence is in question – is disconcerting. I hope that our witnesses today can help us better understand the challenges, problems and options for placing U.S. policy toward Iraq on firmer footing.

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